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U.S. Says Soviet Has A-Warheads in East Europe

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WASHINGTON, June 4 — Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger has asserted that the Soviet Union has deployed nuclear warheads among its military forces in Eastern Europe.

It has long been a matter of public record that Soviet ground and air forces stationed in East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary are armed with weapons capable of employing nuclear warheads. But officials and analysts outside the Government have suggested that the warheads themselves are being kept in the Soviet Union.

Mr. Weinberger, who made his comments in Europe, is apparently the first senior American official to make known what officials said had been closely guarded intelligence information.

Some specialists in Soviet military matters said they were surprised that Mr. Weinberger had made the disclosure, but were not surprised by the substance of the information. In the absence of supporting data, others said they were skeptical.

Low-Yield Explosive Power

The specialists said Mr. Weinberger was apparently discussing tactical nuclear weapons with warheads relatively low in explosive power but accurate in aim. Medium-range missiles and strategic, or intercontinental, missiles are based within the Soviet Union.

Mr. Weinberger, during a news conference earlier this week in Bonn, said the Soviet Union had long kept nuclear weapons in Eastern Europe. An aide said later that Mr. Weinberger had meant warheads and not just the weapons capable of carrying them.

Then, in Norway, Mr. Weinberger said the deployment of the nuclear arms "started to occur since about

1979" and that "many of them are mobile and can go in and out."

He said that a Soviet threat to deploy nuclear weapons in Eastern Europe therefore "would be nothing new."

He was alluding to a Soviet statement on May 28 that said that, if American missiles were deployed in Western Europe at the end of the year, Moscow would take steps "to create the necessary counterbalance."

Booklet Silent on Deployment

The Pentagon's latest edition of a booklet titled "Soviet Military Power" mentioned new tactical nuclear weapons as evidence of a continuing Soviet buildup but said nothing about their deployment in Eastern Europe.

Until now, specialists have said that the Soviet Union has neither deployed the warheads to Soviet forces in Eastern Europe nor given them to allied Warsaw Pact forces because Moscow lacks confidence in the allegiance of its allies.

The specialists said that the Soviet Union had been modernizing its forces in Eastern Europe since about 1978 and that Soviet doctrine called for the integration of nuclear and chemical weapons with conventional weapons.

They said the missiles Mr. Weinberger evidently had in mind were for supporting ground forces, including the SS-21, with a range of 70 miles, the SS-22, with a range of 540 miles, and the SS-23, with a range of 300 miles.

Weapons for even closer support of ground forces would include the 152-millimeter self-propelled artillery gun, the 203-millimeter self-propelled gun, and a 204-millimeter self-propelled mortar. Soviet tactical planes could also carry nuclear bombs.

These tactical nuclear weapons have not been considered, so far as is known publicly, in negotiations with the Soviet Union intended to lead to a reduction in

nuclear armaments. One set of negotiations has focused on intercontinental missiles and bombers, another on intermediate-range weapons in Europe.

An exchange of statements over nuclear weapons began on May 26, on the eve of the Williamsburg meeting of Western leaders, when President Reagan said that the planned deployment of American intermediate-range missiles in Western Europe starting in December was necessary to prod Moscow into reaching an accord at Geneva.

The Russians replied by saying that such deployment would force them to take countermeasures and that the moves might include the deployment of nuclear weapons in Eastern Europe.

That brought a rebuke from the State Department on May 28 and a successful effort by President Reagan to persuade the other leaders at Williamsburg to issue a statement affirming the need to proceed with the planned deployment of medium-range missiles later this year.

Then, Mr. Weinberger stepped into the picture by saying that Moscow already had nuclear weapons in Eastern Europe and that the threatened retaliation would be nothing new.

In the past, Mr. Weinberger and other Administration officials have differed with the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency about the release of secret information. The intelligence agencies have said that disclosure would reveal sources and intelligence methods. The Administration officials have argued that disclosure was necessary to persuade the American people and the Congress that there was a danger from the Soviet Union.